

An analysis of parental involvement in Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Rundu Circuit.

Oiva S. Nauyoma^a, Develias Ngatjiisiue^b Theresia N. Siyave^c &
 Pontianus M. Kamunima^d

Email: onauyoma@unam.na

^{a, b, c} Lecturers in the Faculty of Education and Human Sciences, Department of Early Childhood Education and Care University of Namibia's Rundu Campus

^d Inspector of Education in the Ministry of Education. Kavango East region, Ndiyona Circuit.

Abstract

The study explored parental participation in Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Rundu Circuit. The study aimed to comprehend the Situation of Early Childhood Development in Namibia, variables that impede parent participation in ECD centres, and the obstacles parents confront in becoming involved in ECD centres. Furthermore, the study employed Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological system theory to examine the link between home and school. The study adopted a qualitative literary research approach that analysed parental involvement in education in Rundu Circuit. Semi-structured interviews with the parents were conducted at ECD schools within the Rundu circuit. The data were interpreted using both content and thematic analysis. The study findings highlighted that parents do not understand the importance of ECD programmes. Evidence from the study shows that lack of time, lack of interest, lack of education, poverty, and unemployment hinder parent involvement in ECD centres. The study recommends that parents must be involved in ECD despite life's challenges.

Keywords: Parental involvement, Early Childhood Development, caregiver, stakeholders

1. Introduction

Parental involvement in the education of their children is not a novel concept. Parents' involvement is a broad term that refers to parents' involvement throughout the educational process (Munje & Mncube, 2018; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). More precisely, it refers to parental expectations and views about academic achievement, as well as parental behaviour at home and school, to enhance children's educational performance (Epstein, 2001). Mawere et.al. (2015), stress the issue of parents participating in their children's education stretches back to the eighteenth century. Given the foregoing, it is safe to claim that parental involvement is critical for academic achievement in any child. In some parts of Namibia during the colonial period, parents were involved in school governance and even they were involved in the selection of teachers (Watson et.al., 2012). Thus, it is still happening in Namibia that parents are considered key members of society, as they shape their children's education. Education transformation sought to establish a paradigm that embraces rather than rejects parental engagement (Chavez, 2016, as cited in the Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993). While some parents try to be involved in their children's academic education, however, their involvement varies according to the school's atmosphere and culture. As a result, some parents encounter a range of challenges throughout the procedure.

Nicola et.al. (2016) underscore that investing in children can result in progressive outcomes for a better future nation. Given that each individual's foundation is laid throughout their early childhood stages, this is an ideal time to initiate programs aimed at eradicating poverty, developing social consciousness, and educating children (Bartolome et.al., 2017). Parent involvement is one approach to investing in children while gaining the support of all members of society. A healthy home-school relationship is critical not only for children's early childhood results but also for their long-term well-being. Similarly, Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) emphasize that parents' dedication to their children's learning process creates good opportunities for children to succeed in future roles in society. Consequently, when parents are actively involved in their children's education, the school may readily implement modifications and improvements for the benefit of the children.

Furthermore, before Namibia's independence in 1990, the apartheid-led colonial government (the former South African administration) prohibited parents from participating in their children's academic development (Chavez, 2016, as cited in MEC, 1993). Namibian education reform addressed the aforementioned issue by referring to Article 20 of the Namibian Constitution, which guarantees all children the right to education (Bartolome et.al., 2017). Parental involvement has long been recognised as a critical component of early childhood education. As such, Namibian schools need assistance in achieving these goals, including parental and caregiver involvement.

Jeynes (2005) states that parenting is a concept that affects children's academic success. For example, the notion of parental engagement has not always been obvious and consistent for some Namibian parents. Indeed, it is preferable to comprehend parents' complex character and behavioural patterns in connection to their children's academic performance. Certain teachers intuitively think that parental participation is the answer to many educational problems, as children's experiences are inextricably linked to their

families. Given the critical role that parental involvement plays in their children's academic achievement, this study sought to determine the elements that impact parental involvement in education, particularly in the Rundu circuit.

2. Theoretical framework

The paper's core term, which serves as a theoretical buffer for the study, is Bronfenbrenner's 1977 Ecological system theory, which has been defined by deep thinkers as the relationship between home and school (Nikiforou et al., 2013). This paper employed Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological system theory to examine the link between home and school. The value of this theory lies in its synthesis of numerous methodologies; interdisciplinary, multicultural, and multidirectional in nature; to comprehend the developing child (Rilley et al., 2007). As per this theory, environmental systems influence how parents and other stakeholders participate in, interact with, and support children's education. Additionally, societal and cultural influence how people behave and think. As a result, children's behaviour is influenced by their environment, as defined by Bronfenbrenner's ecological system, and the interactions that exist within it (Bartolome et al., 2017).

Rilley et al. (2007) assert that Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from immediate family and school settings. This theory looks at a child's development within the context of the system of relationships that form part of the environment. The ecological theory underscores the need for working partnerships between early childhood programs, the parents they serve, and the children of the social structure that need to grow (Nikiforou et al., 2013). The values of the community influence social conditions and in turn, be influenced by teachers or children's families. Therefore, factors affecting parental involvement should be approached from the ecological theory perspective.

3. Literature review

3.1 The Situation of Early Childhood Development in Namibia

The rapid growth of Early Childhood Development (ECD) education in Africa can be attributed to the Child Rights Convention's ratification and adoption on 20 November 1989, the World Conference on Education for All (Shepherd, 2006), the Millennium Development Goals, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016). For example, the Dakar Millennium Development Goal No. 1 focuses on the promotion of vulnerable children's early life development (Penn, 2004). UNICEF has prioritized early childhood development and is committed to advancing improvements in the physical environment, curriculum reform, and caregiver and teacher competence (UNICEF, 2008).

However, ECD programs have helped urban, more easily accessible people more than poor and rural communities in several African countries (Sun et al., 2015). Nevertheless, some African countries, including South Africa and Kenya, have made concerted efforts to reach out to neglected populations (UNICEF, 2008). According to Atmore et al. (2012), the Namibian government has recognized the

importance of expanding access to ECD and improving the quality of programs and services, particularly for disadvantaged children.

Furthermore, Beery and Magntorn (2021) indicate that Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Namibia is still in its development, with centres frequently operating as for-profit enterprises. As a result, many ECD falls short of minimum standards in terms of nutrition, health, safety, and parental and community support for active learning. The knowledge and understanding of holistic development are still in their infancy, leaving out critical components of care, development, and education for children.

The NDP 4 asserts that when Namibia invests substantially in early childhood development, returns on investments will improve, and it suggests that leadership and governance of IECD be transferred from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGE CW) to the Ministry of Education (MoE) (NDP 4, 2012). However, the shift has not occurred to the NDP recommendations since it is premature to focus on it while the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture continues to build the pre-primary phase. Rather than that, the essential Ministries are now concentrating their efforts on enhancing inter-ministerial and cross-sectoral collaboration to facilitate the implementation of an integrated approach to early childhood development (Zere, et. Al.,2010).

Historically, missionaries initiated and developed ECD in Namibia (National Integrated Early Childhood Development) (NIECD, 2007). Since then, faith-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the corporate sector have collaborated with the government to foster an environment conducive to the implementation of ECD and Care programs and services. However, the majority of ECD and Care services were reserved for the wealthy, as a result, the majority of children were excluded. The Dakar Conference, which calls on governments to guarantee that education targets and identifies all children, has significantly boosted access to and participation in primary school and ECD (UNESCO,2008). In addition, ECD has risen to prominence on the Dakar Conference's policy agenda, particularly pre-primary education. As a result of the Dakar Conference Declarations, African states, including Namibia, have prioritized ECD (NIECD, 2007).

Moreover, a growing amount of research indicates that investing in early childhood development (ECD) in Namibia can be a wise social and economic investment. However, worldwide investment in early childhood development remains low, and Namibia is no exception. According to NIED (2007), the primary cause for sustained low investment in ECD is the lack of basic health services, which were previously viewed as the duty of parents. Moyo et al., (2012) concur that the rewards of ECD investments are frequently either long-term or not readily apparent in the short term. This means that it is difficult to assign benefits to ECD, even for individuals who directly benefit, which encourages governments to prioritize initiatives with more tangible, if frequently smaller, societal benefits. It is vital, in this setting, that politicians and funders recognize and assess the enormous potential of ECD investment. To this end, Inter-team Namibia commissioned DNA Economics to evaluate the cost of inaction associated with Namibia's sustained low investment in early childhood development in comparison to the costs of extending such investment (UNICEF, 2018).

ECD is primarily sponsored in Namibia by the commercial sector, parents, and communities. According to DNA Economics (2019), ECD service availability in Namibia is still quite low; there are currently 2 961 registered ECD centres in Namibia, each serving an average of 26 children. The inability of many parents to afford and pay fees magnifies the country's ECD centres issues, both in terms of expanding services and increasing the quality of current centres. ECD was identified as the sub-area of most policy relevance in Namibia in light of the aforementioned concerns.

3.2 ECD policy documents

The National Conference on Early Childhood Protection and Development (ECPD), conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture with support from UNICEF in May 1992, was the first step toward the development of Namibia's ECD policy (UNICEF, 2018). The meeting included representatives from a variety of government and non-government organizations, as well as preschool facilities and others. The Conference considered what modifications were necessary to boost existing ECPD programs, as well as what criteria and norms should be established for childcare centres and preschools, as well as personnel credentials. It covered how to engage parents and the community. The role of various government agencies and mechanisms for coordination between government, NGOs, churches, and the private sector, as well as training, curriculum, and material requirements, were explored. Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) affirm unequivocally that early childhood educators with the necessary training and credentials deliver better developmentally appropriate, nurturing, and responsive education and care for young children.

Additionally, the draft policy was vigorously contested, notably by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a long history of providing ECD programs in Namibia and providing training and support to ECD institutions and staff (UNICEF, 2018). The NGOs organised an informal ECD Forum, which met numerous times to deliberate on the policy. One of their primary concerns was ensuring that standards did not exclude those in greatest need — remote, under-resourced ECD clinics. Effective ECD programs are those that are measured against comprehensive regulations that regulate the conditions and provisions that contribute to the provision of effective services. According to Sun et al. (2015), effective government policies must be context-sensitive. As a result, several countries, including Namibia, have established ECD policies to operationalize and control ECD processes and activities. These regulations should consider the unique requirements of all young children, including those who are disabled. National ECD policies, according to UNICEF (2018), often include a policy statement outlining the vision, goals, and essential initiatives, as well as a description of institutional structures. For example, in Namibia, the ECD policy guidelines cover concerns such as children's needs in terms of holistic development, child protection, and child-centred programming, among others (Koech & Njenga, 2006).

The Government of the Republic of Namibia publicized the first National Early Childhood Development Policy in 1996 (National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECD), 2007). ECD programmes in Namibia are IECD because it includes all aspects of children's development holistically including cognitive, social, emotional and physical development and parent participation. The policy

reflects the Government's commitment to ensuring of sound and healthy development of the nation's children.

The Namibian ECD policy and provision in Namibia Policy documents in Namibia highlight ECD provision as a national priority, as articulated through the National Development Plan (NDP5). Implementation of ECD services is guided by the Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) framework.

The IECD framework aims to ensure that all ECD services are comprehensively delivered in a manner that covers all aspects which affect childhood development (namely health and nutritional, educational and social security outcomes). To enhance the coordination management and development of ECD services in Namibia, the IECD framework allocates roles and responsibilities to the key ministries involved in the development of children (Goldenman et al. 2019).

3.3 Challenges to parent's involvement

Parents' involvement in ECD seems to be a challenge. Harris and Morrison (2012) observe that Early childhood programs are aiding parents and families with daily educational and social issues affecting them and their children. However, immersion parents suffer the same concerns as parents in mainstream schools and may face practical and logistical challenges in becoming more involved. For example, parents and schools can be separated by political and social forces within the society, these include time pressures, childcare issues and rival commitments. While schools and ECD centres collaborate with parents and families to build programs that assist them and their children in reaching their full potential, being a single parent, having additional children, and working outside the home might present some unique challenges (Jackson & Remillard, 2005). Moreover, Hannaway et al. (2019) identify three significant impediments to parental involvement: changes in family structures, obstacles faced by parents due to a lack of empowerment, and challenges experienced by teachers.

Firstly, parents are not always aware of their parental responsibilities and their role in engaging their children with home-based school activities. They struggle to satisfy the needs of their children and themselves as a result of challenging circumstances that are frequently beyond their control. The school and home environments should complement one another, and the interaction between parents and teachers/caregiver providers should be one of equality of power distribution rather than asymmetrical power distribution (Greenman et.al, 2008; Hannaway et al. (2019). Secondly, parents experience problems in becoming more involved as some ECD centres do not provide sufficient opportunities for parents to participate. As such parents feel unwelcome at the ECD centre or school, thus they are not empowered enough by the authority to change this (Hannaway et al. (2019). Additionally, parents are not adequately educated on school-related issues such as basic educational principles, and it seems that teachers do not provide an opportunity for parents to receive information in non-technical language at some centres. Harris and Morrison (2012) allude that parents believe that academics have no bearing on what they know as they are unsure how to assist with household duties and may lack formal education

themselves. Some parents appear to assume that they pay school fees, they cannot be expected to assist their children with school-related activities.

Gordon and Browne (2016) argue that the school climate is frequently unwelcoming to parents due to parental views of intimidation by ECD teachers. They may believe their contributions and views are unimportant, and teachers may be judgmental of their parenting abilities. Additionally, there is a vacuum of parent-support programs designed to increase parental involvement; as a result, parents claim they lack the time necessary to participate in their child's school or ECD centre.

lastly, teachers experience- some challenges in supporting parental involvement, as Gordon and Browne (2016) assert that teachers are overburdened and parents expect more of them than educators can manage. They feel frightened by their parents, particularly those with advanced degrees. Additionally, teachers are sceptical of how to engage parents in ways other than through typical activities such as fundraising, school board members, parent evenings, and volunteer work at the centre (Harris & Morrison, 2012). Parents, children, and the program are all part of the process, hence one has to work with anyone who wants to be successful. On other hand, the parent contact is a time-consuming task and teachers often feel burdened with the load. Due to parents' reticence to disclose, caregivers may be ignorant of parents who are experiencing particular social or economic issues. In addition, extended families often do not fill the gaps in care for young children, because urbanization separates nuclear and extended families and because adult members are also often working (Wade, 2015).

4. Methodology

A study is a qualitative approach encased in a phenomenological interpretive framework with the literary analysis of parental involvement in ECD. The significance of this approach is in its capacity to provide extensive textual descriptions of the paper's central concerns, as well as in the way it delivers information about ECD in the Rundu circuit. Semi-structured interviews with the parents were conducted at ECD schools within the Rundu circuit. Twenty parents were interviewed face-to-face within the Rundu Circuit as part of a sample which was purposively chosen for the interviews. Equally, the paper employed both document and content analysis. From the interpretation and analysis, findings were extracted to form discussions and conclusions.

5. Findings and analysis

This section presents a discussion of the findings that were generated from the qualitative part of this study.

5.1 Parent's understanding of ECD

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that when parents are involved in the education of their children, it benefits the learners, the school, and the parents. The findings obtained show that parents understand ECD programmes as it provides socialisation benefits. In addition to self-confidence and self-esteem growth, they emphasised the development of skills, creativity, language, feeding and nutrition, and safety for their children. Some parents added that ECD programmes keep young children off the street. These

responses demonstrated that parents possess ECD knowledge; however, this information must be supported by an understanding of what ECD programmes entail. This became evident when the combined responses of parents revealed:

" Children enjoy it when their parents are involved. When their parents come to the centre, children are extremely proud of their parents. A child can take pride in the fact that his father fixed all of the desks. The children of all parents who volunteer at school improve. However, the majority of parents do not comprehend ECD programmes. Some parents send their children to school without knowing what's happening or what the classroom looks like. "

It is evident from the preceding quotation that parents do not comprehend the ECD programmes. Moreover, this suggests that parents send off their children to the ECD centre, claiming that all responsibility should rest with the carers. Thus, they send their children there to be cared for while they are at work and are not responsible for their education. In addition, children are not the source of their difficulties, therefore focusing solely on them may not solve their problems. The family is the micro-unit that provides everyday shelter for the children. Therefore, if parents do not support ECD programmes, they will have little to no effect.

The findings from interviews suggest that parents should be included in ECD programmes and activities. They can support and assist teachers with various chores, such as homework, supply and contribute materials and equipment, and be present for children. The study also revealed some parents contribute through volunteering at the centre, participating in fundraising, and assisting with the centre's remodelling and construction. Some parents feel that they support centres by paying school fees and contributing to school development funds as a result, they believe that they are unable to perform all of the duties expected of the teachers. However, they may only help by attending parent meetings and making advice.

5.2 Parents' involvement in education activities

The study shows that some parents find it challenging to participate in educational activities, primarily to their low levels of education. These findings corroborate with Larocque et al. (2011), who discovered that uneducated parents can feel inadequate to the task of being involved in their children's education. In addition, Baker (2014) further highlighted that parents' reluctance to participate is typically due to their lack of skills or knowledge. The study found that some parents are unable to detect problems their children encounter, while others have inadequate knowledge of parenting skills, child raising, and child development. Some caregivers alluded that:

"Some parents are uneducated and do not know how to assist their children; they bring their children here to the ECD or the library, and when they return home, they do not know what to do with them. Occasionally, parents are reluctant to join because they lack knowledge. Parents should feel free to engage, should contact us if they need assistance, and should not feel embarrassed or humiliated about their lack of education because they may be of great assistance"

The aforementioned quotation illustrates that the majority of ECD parents are illiterate and struggle to assist their children with their education. They are unemployed and reliant on government payments for social assistance. As a result, some parents cannot afford to buy their children's necessities, which can inhibit their participation at the ECD centre. In light of the aforementioned comments and what has been covered thus far, it is evident that the absence of basic needs presents a problem for parents and impedes their participation in ECD centres.

5.3 Improving parental involvement in ECD programmes

The study's findings suggest that there is a need to build and strengthen a harmonious interaction between school and home for parents to comprehend their children's community and home life. In addition, Edu caregivers should be knowledgeable about parents' educational goals for their children, family and community values and conventions, and so be able to demonstrate how children are educated in their homes and communities. The study further revealed that some parents supported the sentiment that, as the first educators, parents should serve on the ECD committee, attend planned parent meetings, and engage in ECD programmes. However, some Edu caregivers reiterated that parents should bring their children on time and aid in guiding them in the right direction. Some parents retaliated that they are participating in ECD programmes by directing and caring for their children, assisting with schoolwork, and providing support to centres.

The results indicate that some parents are enthusiastic about their participation in ECD programmes and activities; nevertheless, their awareness of parental participation in ECD programmes is limited. As a result, parents should be educated on alternative ways they might participate, such as resource persons or income-generating enterprises. Through parental involvement, parents will be familiar with ECD programmes, so expanding their ECD knowledge and supporting overall growth. With parental involvement, ECD programmes can positively impact children and Rundu Circuit in general. This is evident when Edu's carers revealed that:

"The children cherish it when their parents are coming to school; they will approach me and say, "My mother is coming to do tuck today;" it makes them feel so special and this demonstrates that their parents care about their education. I hope the parents could see the joy on the children's faces because their mothers have finally arrived. The child's pride causes them to develop and grow well. When parents attend a school or become active in their children's education, they may also observe changes in their children".

The aforementioned quotation argues that parental involvement is the key to their children's success. As a result, the ECD programme's involvement of parents can enhance parent-child relationships and allow older siblings to attend school without caring for younger siblings.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The paper focused on parent involvement in ECD in the Rundu Circuit. During the colonial period in part regions of Namibia, parents were involved in school governance and the appointment of ECD teachers.

Rundu Circuit is not exempted. The study's primary concern was the lack of parental involvement in ECD programme activities in Rundu Circuit. Early childhood development has become a policy priority in Namibia since it offers a wide range of social and economic benefits to improve learning outcomes. Children learn and develop in a variety of settings, including ECD centres and at home with their families. Parents have a vital role to play in a variety of circumstances. It has been demonstrated that parental engagement in their children's education is an important variable that favours their education.

The findings indicate that parents understand what ECD is because it gives socialisation benefits to their children, but they do not comprehend what ECD programmes comprise. Lack of parent involvement in ECD centres is a concern because this hurts a child's education. Parent involvement in ECD centres must be prioritised and taken seriously. Furthermore, the study's findings show parents require a healthy relationship between school and home to understand their children's community and home life. Edu carers should know parents' educational aspirations for their children, family and community values and norms, and how children are educated in their homes and communities.

The study recommends that parents must be involved in ECD despite life's challenges. Edu carers and parents should create parental participation programmes that benefit children and the community.

These include fundraising days, fun walks, and cleanliness campaigns. There should be educational initiatives to inform parents of the significance of ECD programmes for them and the community. These recommendations are based on the findings of this study and include techniques and ideas for increasing parental participation in ECD centres. Increasing parental participation in ECD centres will ultimately help children and the whole community.

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